

IN FOCUS Message on Local Collaboration

In Focus: Continuum of Care and Local Government Partnerships

Over the past three and a half years, Continuums of Care (CoCs) and their partners worked tirelessly to ensure people experiencing or at risk of homelessness remained safe during the pandemic. This enormous effort required unprecedented collaboration across federal, state, and local partners. Communities that successfully reduce homelessness have close partnerships between their CoCs and Local Governments. With state and local leaders, people with lived experience, CoC members, and other stakeholders working together, communities can reduce the number of people becoming homeless and re-house and support all those experiencing homelessness. The Office of Special Needs Assistance (SNAPS) encourages CoCs to identify the needs and priorities of their local jurisdiction(s) to align efforts and build stronger partnerships to effect meaningful change. This message lays out several strategies to achieve this goal.

Collaborate and communicate with the leadership of local government entities. The CoC structure was designed to include key local partners, including elected leaders and government officials at the state, county, and municipal levels, at the table to devise and implement the myriad of strategies needed to end homelessness. This collaborative and inclusive structure is necessary because homelessness is a multi-faceted problem that requires solutions that no single sector or agency can solve alone. Each jurisdiction is structured differently, bringing benefits and challenges to the work. For some CoCs, City or County government serves as both the CoC lead and collaborative applicant and the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) recipient, sometimes in the same department. Other CoCs are led by a local nonprofit serving one or more jurisdictions. Regardless of the structure, a successful CoC brings together and coordinates the resources and insights of all public and private partners (including state, county, or city governments, including elected and appointed leaders and their staff), aligning goals, data, and strategy.

Work alongside local leaders to address unsheltered homelessness and encampments. There is always public pressure for a speedy response to encampments. However, a CoC can facilitate an effective, cross-sector, well-planned, and humane approach to re-house unsheltered households. Outreach providers and municipal or county governments can partner to identify and respond to needs such as obtaining IDs and accessing federal, state, and local benefits. Municipal and county governments can also direct or leverage resources other than CoC or ESG to support efforts to resolve encampments, such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). A “housing surge” as described below can support an effective resolution to encampments. Read the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness’ (USICH’s) [Z Principles for Addressing Encampments](#) and [Resource Roundup for Addressing Encampments](#) as well as HUD’s [Protecting the Health and Well-being of People in Encampments and Other People Who Access Public Spaces](#) to inform your community’s response. The HUD and Health and Human Services (HHS) joint study on [Unsheltered Homelessness and Homeless Encampments in 2019](#), provides specific community examples and insights.

Integrate the work of the CoC with city or county partners including elected leaders. Work with locally elected leaders to formally join the CoC board and take leadership positions in the CoC. Being on the CoC board or having a leadership position in the CoC provides more opportunities for coordination and collaboration. If leaders are unable to join the CoC board formally, regularly invite them to join meetings or sit on committees. For example, local leaders often receive calls for help from those at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This avenue could be formalized as a new entry point into the local homeless response system.

Plan and implement a “housing surge” with elected leaders to quickly move people into housing. [This resource](#) on the HUD Exchange describes the key components of a housing surge, outlines the steps and best practices for operationalizing a housing surge, and provides examples of housing surges implemented in communities in different situations. [House America: An All-Hands-on-Deck Effort to Address the Nation’s Homelessness Crisis](#) was a federal initiative in which HUD and USICH invited mayors, city and county leaders, tribal nation leaders, and governors into a

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national partnership to encourage housing surges utilizing [American Rescue Plan](#) resources, alongside other federal, tribal, state, and local resources to re-house 100,000 households experiencing homelessness.

Partner effectively with your local government and state or local public housing agencies (PHAs). Public housing agencies (PHAs) administer housing programs like public housing and voucher programs that are vital to addressing homelessness. PHAs may be quasi-governmental agencies or may be a state or local government agency. Many PHAs are governed by board members that include members appointed by elected officials. CoCs can work with PHAs to ensure that Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) and special vouchers (such as Stability Vouchers, Mainstream Vouchers, and Emergency Housing Vouchers) have a well-developed homeless or “move-on” preferences. Encourage PHAs to select program participants through the CoC Coordinated Entry process whenever possible. For households with Vouchers or in Public Housing that are at risk of losing their subsidy, work collaboratively with the local PHA(s) to implement early intervention strategies to maintain housing stability. In most cases, [partnership with the CoC](#) provides significant benefits to PHAs.

Collaborate with law enforcement and state and local governments to eliminate policies and practices that criminalize homelessness. Local governments and CoCs can implement strategies that help unsheltered people move into permanent housing with supportive services to meet their needs rather than resorting to policies that criminalize homelessness. In many communities, law-enforcement partners effectively with outreach teams, providing unique insights and preventing unnecessary arrests or other negative outcomes. See the new resource on the HUD Exchange, [Leading with Kindness in Encampment Resolution](#).

Participate actively in the [Consolidated Plan Process and Annual Action Plan through the Consultation and Citizen Participation process](#) or through other formal means. Identify ways that CoC efforts align with ESG and other Community Planning and Development (CPD) block grant programs. For example, identify opportunities to align with the annual HOME program, HOME-American Rescue Plan (HOME-ARP), Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), and CDBG-CV to create new housing and homeless assistance opportunities. Find opportunities to work with the Housing Opportunity for People with AIDS (HOPWA) program to encourage utilization of the CoC coordinated entry system for services and housing. Provide Point in Time and Housing Inventory Count data to ensure that local homelessness information is communicated and addressed in the Consolidated Plan updates.

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